

Trauma, Culture, Resiliency, & Spirituality

Webinar Lecture Presented at
DUKE University 's Center for Spirituality, Theology, & Health.

by Naji Abi-Hashem, PhD

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• • *Thank You for Attending this Seminar* • •

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Abstract -- Summary

This **presentation** will try to rediscover and revisit the foundational role of **culture** and describe its overarching and underlying force in shaping/influencing the mental-emotional-communal experiences of all human beings. Existential outlook, worldview, religious culture, faith-beliefs, and social heritage play major roles in defining what is health, illness, hardship, loss, gain, trauma, survival, and contentment-happiness.

I argue that **Culture** is a very compound concept and fluid paradigm that is difficult to fully define or totally comprehend. Virtually, **religion and culture** are closely intertwined and inseparable, as one feeds, informs, and shapes the other mutually and reciprocally.

The concept and study of **Religion**, although very broad and has a Theological flavor, it is more Sociological and Ideological in nature. When religion is used as stand-alone-word, it is confusing and conveys multiple connotations and meanings, therefore it is important to qualify which specific aspects or layers of religion we questioning and discussing.

While **spirituality** is welcomed in academia and news-media, as a hot-topic in recent decades, it has been divorced from mainstream religious traditions and well-known religiousness. Here, we discuss the pros & cons of such splitting-dualism and present a challenge for us to reintroduce the rich terminology of **Soul-Spirit** back into public discourse, as the core-essence of our human nature.

Finally, I argue that the ability for enduring, coping, and surviving and the capacity for growing and thriving in resiliency is more than an individual's innate trait, but a generative potential and a communal capital. Moreover, **Resiliency** is very much a function of warm cultures and is innately stored in nurturing communities.



So to begin, let us ask

What really constitutes Trauma as a human expression & experience?

Is Trauma the same in all places and among various people, across time and cultures?

Does it follow the same standards, symptoms, criteria, and treatment plans everywhere?

Are all diagnostic manuals relevant or automatically applicable in other parts of the world?
Or shall we let local people define/describe their own experiences before we label them?

That applies also to the notions of “what is” -- **Health, illness, hardship, loss-grief, attachment-gain, anxiety, depression, traumatic stress, tragedy, survival, and contentment, and life-satisfaction.**

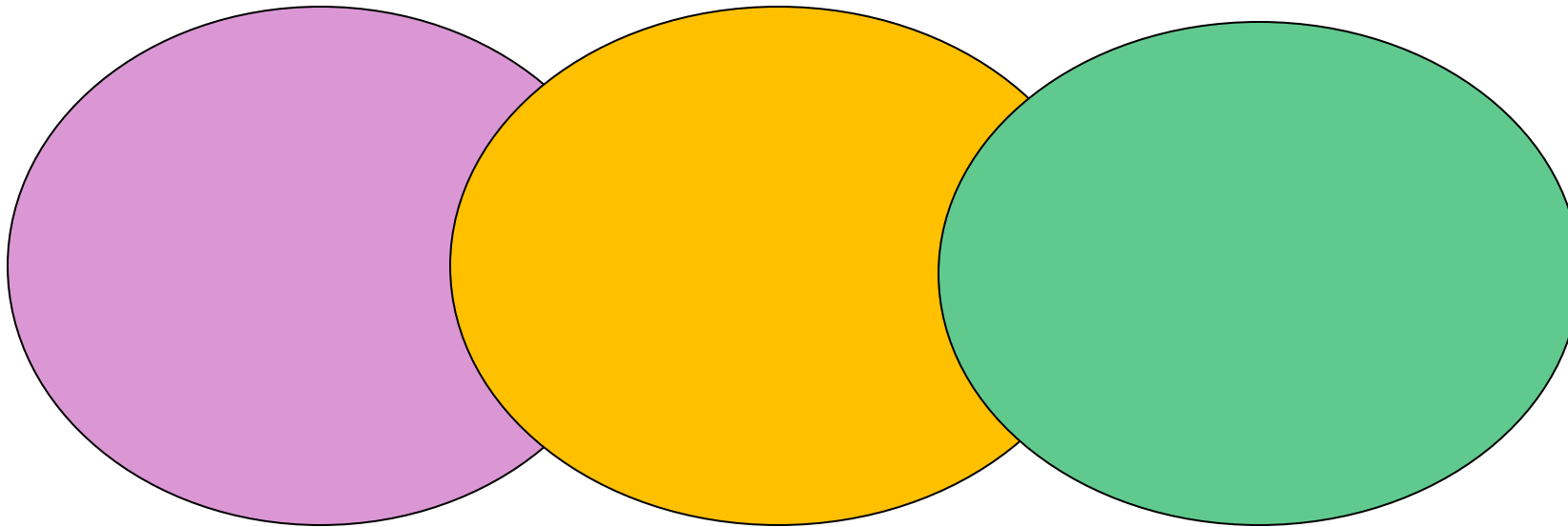
We know from our own journey that no mental-emotional **experience** is continuous – there are always breaks of relief in struggles as there are set-backs in prosperity and flourishing.

Similarities & Differences Between

Grief
Loss

Trauma
Tragedy

Abuse/Violence
Maltreatment





As we revisit “**Trauma**,” we find that this term is being used extensively both in therapeutic circles and popular media.

Lots of discussions, books, literature, training, and publicity, all focused on trauma, social traumatic-experiences, trauma-diagnosis, trauma-informed care & treatment, etc...



Currently, we also hear about **micro-aggression** as traumatic, **racial-ethnic harassment** as traumatic, **social anxiety** as traumatic, **Corona virus** seclusion/masks isolation as traumatic, any **sexual comments** (not molestations-abuse) as traumatic, exposure to **polarized politics** as traumatic... So where do we stop, where is the ceiling of “non-traumatic” human experiences?

Trauma now seems to be the **new trend** and buzz-word. Everything should be **trauma-informed** in education, psychology, psychotherapy, and medical care.

Before that, the trends included– **Borderline** personality types & **Codependency** & the need for **Recovery** (everybody should be in recovery group or therapy), & **Evidence-based** everything ...

Some theorists are challenging the overuse of **PTSD** & related **Traumatic Diagnoses**.

Trauma & Resilience psychologists and researchers, like Bonnano, Meichenbaum, Masten, and others, clearly emphasize that most people recover naturally; some faster than others, without suffering long-term residual effects or mental-emotional symptomatology.

And Recovery-Resiliency among some local groups, and in different parts of the world, is more common and natural than thought otherwise.

Every cultural way-of-life, ethos, tight-knit society has its strengths and weaknesses, healthy-bright sides and unhealthy-dark sides. Some aspects need to be encouraged and enhanced, and some need to be challenged and gradually changed. But who and how we do that?

Here comes the skills of cross-cultural communication and counseling -- all must be done with sound psychological empathy, spiritual care, human sensitivity, and existential humility.

It takes years of experience to differentiate between **what is clinical and **what is cultural**, what is normal-acceptable (*non-diagnostic*) and what is abnormal, what is natural-tolerable versus unnatural and/or pathological (*diagnostic*).**

Role of Collective Wisdom and Metaphors ~ we can find these treasures embeded in the traditional & cultural proverbs, wise sayings, and human refelections along life journey, as comforting sentiments, generational wisdom, bestowing blessings, wishful prayers, and rich favors.

(similar to the proverbs collected by king Solomon in Old Testamtent)

These are golden nuggets and silver linings about the causes of misfortunes and how to handle pain, choose the right, and how to remain focused, grateful, moving forward, and content in spite of unpleasant circumstances.

Grief and Loss

Death and Bereavement

Violence and Hostility

Tragedy and Disaster

Are Universal Experiences

*and they have broad global and sociocultural
meanings & definitions, which transcend time,
space, age, background, ethnicity, and location.
Each community, society, & culture will define, frame,
interpret, and express such **experiences** differently.*

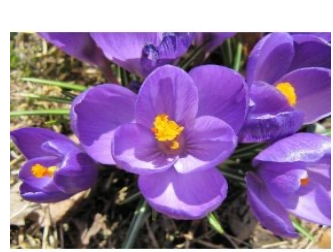
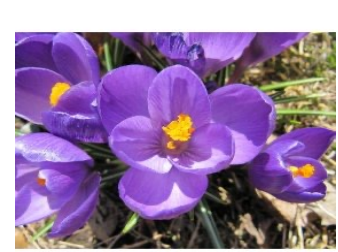
Four Factors Determining our Reactions:

- (1) Current Level of Comfort and Social Affluency;**
- (2) Types of Expectations (of self-others-God-society-life);**
- (3) Psychological History & Emotional Background;**
- (4) Presence of an Intimate Supportive & Nurturing Community.**

***Conceptualization & Treatment of Tragedy, Loss, War Trauma, and Grief are a
Culturally Challenging Task***

Also, when dealing with the aftermath of conflicts, disasters, and wars, it is essential to move beyond the concept of private-individual-personal trauma to the level of ***Social Trauma*** and ***Collective Grief***.

Virtually, there are parallels and similar characteristics to **“Trauma responses”** and **“Grief reactions”** when comparing a large community, nation, or society to an individual self or person.



Resiliency is a Fascinating Topic

It is intriguing and well attractive subject.

Although, it is widely studied, there still is a mysterious side to it.

Here we explores the meaning, nature, and role of resiliency as a driving force within many personality faculties, network relationships, and human endeavors.

My study and investigation of resiliency is based on vast readings, thorough reviews of the literature, cross-cultural experiences, anthropological observations, and clinical-therapy and pastoral care.

In addition, it is based on my interactions/relationship/interviews with people from various ethnic-racial-national backgrounds, socio-economic statuses, and religious mindsets throughout the years.

Recurring Theme: **Resiliency** is not only an innate-individual trait (*intra-psychic*), very distinct and too specific, or an isolated characteristic of a small family-unit (*interpersonal*), but it is in addition a social faculty, a capital of resources stored in the larger group and activated in the organic community, as an empowering-bonding entity, that manifests itself in strong identity, belonging, and perseverance.

Simply put, Resiliency is a Function of Culture.

And Culture is Intertwined with Existential Spirituality & Religious Worldview.

Most spheres of knowledge could be enriched and advanced if they incorporate **cultural resiliency** into their basic practical training and helping skills.

Here we Discover the Cultural Wealth & Draw from the Generational Wisdom.

Therefore, in addition to the other factors-mediators, which affect healthy coping, surviving, and striving, **Resiliency** is fundamentally much more than individual characteristic *[as a Micro psychological entity]*

It is a function of culture, social identity, existential outlook, and generational wisdom, all stored in the community, which is intimately bonding, emotionally supportive, and forwardly oriented *[as a Macro psycho-socio-cultural entity]*

*How can we then Conceptualize a Psychology or Sociology of Resiliency?
And Who are we Becoming Culturally in this Globalized and Polarized Age?*





Resiliency refers to our Human Potential and the combined Individual-Collective Spirit, that are blended together in mutual harmony, which in turn enable people to face adversity, tolerate ambiguity, handle pressure, and cope with crises constructively and positively, and to recover well enough from disasters, calamities, and tragedies.

However, not without a cost, an emotional price, a scar, or a heaviness.. at the same time also without being totally broken under the weight of misfortunes, agonies, or calamities.

Resiliency is not a Superficial Optimism, Utopia Hype, or Fleeting Surge of Energy.

Rather it is a Foundational Faculty and a Solid Construct.

Resilient people and groups/teams know Suffering well. They grow to become Seasoned.

They do not Waste their Pain but Transform Adversities and Hardships into Strength and Fortitude through Endurance and Meaning-Making attitude & purpose.

* * * * *

***So, are we Built to Ultimately Survive & Overcome?
Or to Fail, Fall, Go Under, & Continue to Struggle?***



Now to the Question:

Is Resiliency -

Common or Rare phenomenon?

Normal or Abnormal feature?

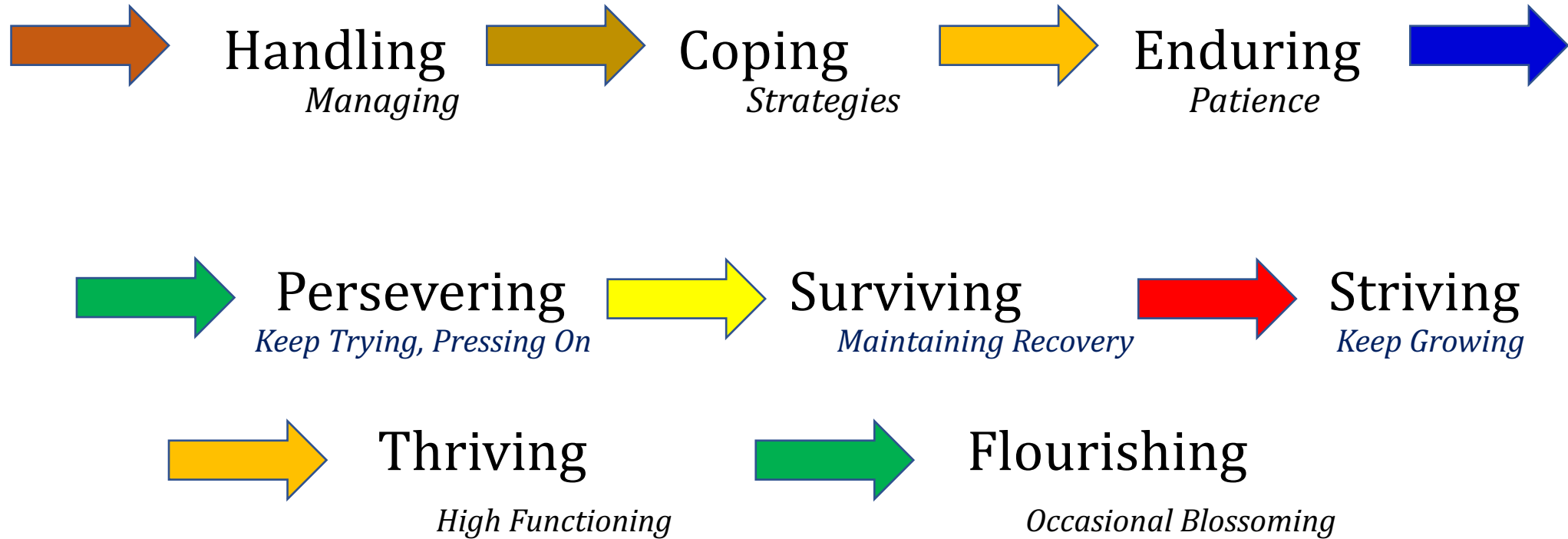
Innate or Acquired trait?

Readily Available or Slowly Retrievable?

Ordinary or Extraordinary?

Natural or Supernatural? ...

Possible Progressive Stages



Perhaps for some people, families, groups, & communities exceeding the previous level of functioning at each stage



***Does Surviving & Thriving depend on the absence-removal of adversities
or upon meeting all our basic needs?***



Many anthropologists have clearly noticed that people--elderly, children, women in very poor and remote areas easily have a smile on their face, a spark in their eyes, a zeal for live, and a deep sense of contentment, compared to those who have plenty more, elsewhere in the world.

Level of Tolerance & Degree of Comfort determine what experience becomes Traumatic:
*Unpleasant Inconvenience - Discomfort – Serious Challenge – Crisis – Hardship – Severe Stress –
Tragic Loss – Major Calamity...*

**So when does normal stress become Traumatic Stress?
and when a challenging or painful event becomes a significant Trauma?**

*Even for us, what we consider as severe stress at one day/season may be normal and regular part of
life at another season!*

Obviously, there is a correlateion between emotional vulnerability and social disconnectivity!

*In most urban settings and industrial societies and predominetly in the global west, the notion of
Individuality is highly regarded as an essential societal norm & value.*

Me, Myself, I, & Mine – It is my opinion, my decision, my space, my rights, my privacy, my boundary, my views, my preferences, my values, my spirituality, my version of reality or truth, my needs, etc...

ROLE OF COMMUNITY IN WARM CULTURES

People in tight-knit community and bonded-relationship do not leave each other alone, neither in time of celebration nor in time of sadness-- even in time of desiring fellowship over enjoyable meals and music together with friends and relatives. Spontaneous invitations/visits/stops/calls are very natural and common.

Also, invisible attachments give a sense of security and solidarity.

Meaning I am/we are part of a communal tribe, not facing the world alone.

Spirituality & faith are embedded in this reality, that we are not floating alone in this universe but we rely on both our Human agency and our Divine agency,
(as almighty providence and superpower deity).

Here the common religious values, heritages, and beliefs are foundational factors. They are equally important to any binding solidarity and even national identity.

Research in the West repeatedly finds many negative impacts of isolation and disconnection and many benefits for being an integral part of meaningful relationships-friendships, warm networks, caring circles, and the like.

So, there is an Urgent Need to Reinvent Community at times when such important Social Glue and Lively Fabric are Disappearing.



The Case of Lebanon as an Example:

Lebanon was known as the Switzerland of the Middle East ~ Beirut as **Paris** of East Mediterranean.

Being Caught in the middle of Regional Conflicts.

Multiple Crises, Fightings, Tragedies, & Endless Struggles...

Cities are International and Cosmopolitan in Nature & Lifestyle.

Amalgam of Mosaic Subcultures & Rich Heritages.

Blending the Traditional with the Modern & Complex Lifestyles.

Unique in Social Tapestry, which is both its Strength & Weakness.

Religious Affiliation serve as “Social Identity” not Theological Doctrine.

Recently, the situation is very dire as you hear in the news... I spent there over 5 months, since February 2024 serving, encouraging, caring for people, mixing, sharing hope in spite of their uncertainties, etc...

When I asked people “How are you? Are you managing life alright?” “Are you surviving well enough?”

Almost always and invariably, people would say “Thank God” – Hamdullah (arabic):

“We are still alive and still surviving...” then they proceed to briefly describe their struggles and adversities... and later come back to say, “but we are still alive by Grace of God and have enough so far, living on bare minimum... We are not alone facing these devastations and agonies... We are like everybody else, similar to all we face these dark times. We lost hope in human leaders and earthy politics, but we have God above, who is our last resort.”

People seem to offer solidarity to each other and are willing to join together in the same destiny.

Calamities:

For two decades militias establishing & fighting and other people's wars took place devastating country.

Then the Syrian regime rules and abused Lebanon for 25 years.

Then the Financial Breakdown of all Banks and Major Economic Meltdown. Government is totally paralyzed.

Then, the Massive Explosion of the Beirut Port on August 04, 2020.

Then, gradually country is taken over by **2.5 Million Syrian Refugees** since 2011. They turned into Settlers and Transplants. Lebanon hosts the largest number of Displaced People, Refugees, Migrants, and Newcomers in the world, given its size and population (less than 6 millions).

Then, Now is the Major Impass, Serious Escalation, and Dangerous War-Games-Exchanges, which could ignite the whole region in flames.

So, this tiny country has been suffering and struggling and on hold for 4 decades, with no end in sight! What would you say to people who are so depleted, tired, and at the end of their rope? with difficult present and bleak future? How would you begin to help and bring some healing and hope?

People are drained, hopeless, exhausted from trying again, using every bit of energy to survive.

No Tolerance Remains. No Resilience is Left in Store, No Energy or Zeal for Life...

People are just going thru the Motion, almost trying to stay afloat from day to day.

*Huge shortages of Electricity, Medicine, cash, Food, Fuel, etc.
No Middle Class Left Anymore. **People Falling Into Poverty.***



*A huge Poster went up shortly before I left Beirut saying in a few words:
"Enough, Please, We Are Really Tired!" And in small print: "Lebanon Does Not Want War!"*



So What is Culture?

How best can we understand, conceptualize, and define CULTURE?

Like many terms, concepts, constructs, themes, realities, Culture is difficult to fully define or totally comprehend, because of its rich and complex nature, role and function, layers and dimensions, impact and influence, etc...

Actually, if we search the literature, we may find about **150 definitions** for "culture," so it is a compound term and a remarkable phenomenon.

Mono-culture, mono-linguistic, linear thinking, focused reasoning, individualistic lifestyle, isolated perspective, one-track mentality, restricted worldview, all limit the real meaning and the deep appreciation of **culture**.

Research about multi languages give the brain a broader perspective and give the group a larger prolific schema-persona and worldview.

After 50 years of formal study, observations, cross-cultural travels, interviews, social mixing, and clinical experience, I came to realize that,

“Cultures are better Felt than Defined and better Experienced than Explained.”

So, I remain a faithful and dedicated student of culture.

*Any Culture can be understood as a way of feeling, acting, and believing.
It is the knowledge of the community and people-group stored for future use.*

Virtually, “Culture is a Design of Life.”

*Culture shapes the life of the community and in return is shaped by the community.
It is at once **the cause, process, and outcome.***

*Cultures have an **abstract** and a **concrete** element to them.*

*They are **tangible** and **symbolic**, temporal and moral.*

*They represent a timeline as silver lining, a connectivity with the **past** and a continuity for the **future.***

That leads us to consider Community. So, what exactly is Community?

Gemeinde (German); Muheet el-Jamaa'ah (Arabic); Communauté (French);

Community is the bridge between the **single-individual** or smaller family-unit and the **Society** at large, including its subcultures.

Community is larger than a small family unit and smaller than Society at large.

It is the **Glue that binds** individuals, families, relatives, neighbors, teachers, extended families--like uncles, aunts, cousins, elders, local leaders, neighbors, shop owners, local religious figures...

It is also the **Glue that holds Society together** along with its subgroups.

It keeps all in harmony, orbiting around each other like a solar social system. 😊

Community is like a healthy psycho-social **Tribe**, its members are integral parts, running in each other's orbit, functioning as a lively **organism**, with a strong sense of **unspoken belonging**. Similar to the idea of **Koinonia** in biblical Scriptures, where people are members of each other and an integral part of the larger *Family of Faith*.

Resiliency is a Team Effort or Team Enterprise not merely solo performance. Even when the person is alone, the **introject** of the supporting community and the **internalization** of the generational stream, sustain him or her, knowing that he or she are part of a larger invisible network and the continuation of a beautiful legacy. That is the **DNA** of communal and cultural resiliency

Religious Affiliation is an essential part of people's "Social Identity."

That is true in the Middle East as in all Faith-Based Communities.

Religiously speaking, people can be nominal believers, cultural believers, committed practicing believers, or occasional social believers. whether Muslims, Christians, Jewish, Druze, Bhuddists, Hindus...

Regardless if they have little faith, no faith, or strong faith....

They do take part of their ***socio-cultural traditions***,

like feasts and rituals and holidays...

which also are, at the core, ***religious traditions***.

Again, we see an inseparable link between Social Norms & Religious Cultures.

Spirituality – Psyché or SOUL

What happened to the notion of SOUL in Humanities, Psychology, and Natural Sciences?

To put things into perspective, we can say that:

Not only we have rational thoughts but we are Rational beings.

Not only we have a mind but we are a Conscious Mind.

Not only we have a soul but we are a Soul (*Nephesh*)

Not only we have a spirit but we are a Spirit (*Rouah, Pneuma*)

Some go further to say that we not only have a body but we are a Body (*Soma*)
(esp. Atheists & Materialists seem to believe that it is all Tissues, Particles, & Physiology)

Body, Sarx, Flesh בְּשָׂרַי (Jassad-Jessim-Bashar)

Instead of **Self-Care**, I started using **Soul-Care** (*having a full seminar on this topic*)
Perhaps we are not physical beings with a spiritual nature but the way around.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

According to Teilhard de Chardin

***"We Are not Human Beings Having a Spiritual Experience.
We Are Spiritual Beings Having a Human Experience"***

The term and notion of **SOUL** is so wide, deep, and rich that it summarizes the whole human personality and integrates all its faculties, just in **this one word**.

Soul is also used metaphorically to describe the invisible movements and reactions of an assembly, a group, a community, or even a nation (e.g., the soul of a nation).

It is very comprehensive and all encompassing. Philosophers, Theologians, Poets, and many other thinkers, have written about the soul extensively. Like the **concept of Heart**--which according to ***biblical psychology*** is the organizing principle of the whole personality. **Soul** as a soft term, resonates with our human nature, passion, and existential experiences.

Humanities, natural sciences, psychology, education, medicine, and many other disciplines have almost become **Souless**. Here is a call to **re-introduce the soul back** into the present body of knowledge and various specialties. *(cf. Duvall, 1998; Johnson 2007)*

Soul & Spirit are similar yet different in some ways. At times they are used **interchangeably**.
Dichotomy or Trichotomy?

So, it is important to always conceptualize any theme or human experience from a multidisciplinary perspective and sociocultural dimensions.

Regarding the **Spirit**, we find so many conceptualizations, mostly in professional literature (non religious/theological per se) overlapping with **Soul**:

Here are some insights about and some definitions of the Human Spirit:

The **core** of our self. Our **conscious mind**, rooted in our moral **conscience**.

Essence of our being. Ability for **self-analysis**, self-awareness, and **meta-cognition**.

The part of us that desires to **transcend** and **worship** a supernatural being who is above and beyond ourselves.

The passion in us to **live** eternally and to project ourselves into the **far future**.

The organizing **principle** of our humanness and personhood.

Moral Faculty that appreciates truth and justice. **Drive** for purpose, hope, and meaning.

The **Seal** where the **Imago Dei** is fully imprinted and actively manifested.

When living and interacting inside a society that is **God-Honoring**, this colors people's schema and consciousness as active members and residents of that community.

Ironically, most of these **people are not aware** of such resource-capital-ability within and around them (*like communal bond around family and faith*); neither would they have labeled themselves as **resilient**. Looking back, they usually are **surprised** to survive well and remained not seriously damaged, or at least, minimally affected or bruised.

For psychology, medicine, and other helping-professions, to divorce their disciplines from that reality is sad and make them lose a major familiar factor of faith-in-action and available resource for sustaining their healing and health.

So then, **Resiliency** is the ability to cultivate *hopefulness* in the face of *hopelessness*, and to *mobilize survival* in the midst of an *acute stress & despair*.

Although there has been a wealth of information written on the subject, more is needed :

to comprehend its multi-layered roots, types and functions, roles and dynamics, and sources and potentials, and to explore its detailed effects, deep impacts, and broad influences.

Moreover, it is equally important to understand how *resiliency* is similar to or different from other *Human* faculties, gifts, talents, and personality traits.
Again, some theorists believe that Resiliency is only Innate & Imprinted Ability. Others believe it is only a Learned Skill. I found both to be True!

Perhaps, it is both Ascribed and Acquired.
That is consistent with a spiritual-biblical worldview.
*Because all human Beings possess an **Imago Dei**, and thus we are able to form, enjoy, and belong to a **Koinonia**,*
as an intimate communion in the community of faith.
A Socio-Spiritual Assembly that is extremely inviting, edifying, and nurturing.



“More Definitions of Resilience”

Bouncing back, enduring toughness, coping nicely, hanging-in-there, recovering adequately (not perfectly), exhibiting relative strength, weathering tribulation (without cracking), springing forward, overcoming adversity, and being resourceful.

*It is the **ability of a system, community, organism, or society**, which is exposed to **serious hazards & insulting shocks**, to resist, absorb, and accommodate these stressors, in a timely and efficient way, through the **preservation and restoration** of its basic structures and essential functions...*

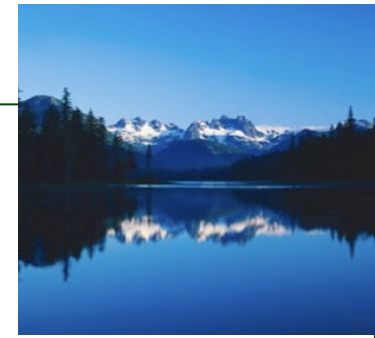
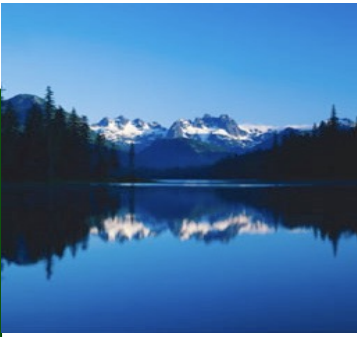
*Obviously, each system, person, or group has a **Threshold of Fatigue**.*

*Once reaching a **Saturation level**, it takes longer to recover.*

Thus, the more resilient a system is, the better resistant the system becomes.

According to the United Nations (2009)

*The resilience of a **community** in respect to potential hazardous events is determined by the degree to which it has the necessary **resources** and is capable of **[re]Organizing** itself both prior to and during times of crisis and acute need/struggle.*



Conceptual Considerations

***Virtually, Culture and Resiliency
are Intertwined, Interdependent, and Interactive.***

*The creative and dynamic energy of resiliency is always shaped and nurtured by the **cultural variation** and **traditional heritage** of people and, **in turn**, it shapes their psycho-social parameters and influence their human capitals and cultural mediators.*

Although **resiliency has elements of motivation, inspiration, management, creativity, ingenuity, and enthusiasm**, both on individual and communal levels, it is not identical to any of these singular qualities per se, but actually, it is the sum of all the above ingredients and properties... **and much more.**

In addition, there are **Cultural Mediators** and **Spiritual Factors** at work in every aspect of the process of **Coping, Surviving**, and **Thriving**.

Therefore, I would call that phenomenon **CULTURAL RESILIENCY** *and categorize it as a rich concept with a socio-cultural fluidity and a psycho-spiritual energizing force.*

According to Sandberg & Grant (2017)

Resiliency is the **strength** and the **speed** with which we **respond** to adversity.

It does **not** mean **rejecting *negative feelings or unpleasant thoughts***.

At times, there are some misconceptions about how we view or react to common setbacks, struggles, and sufferings. No one can be always a ***thriving-resilient*** with no set-backs, because that is not real life, for there is a time and a season for everything under the sun.

Bonanno (2004) asserted that **Resiliency is more common** than traditionally perceived!

He challenged the negative assumptions about lingering the victim-sufferer-survivor mentality and the indefinite need for psychotherapy.

To Masten (2015), resilience is more ordinary than extraordinary.

The ***degree of resiliency*** available and stored within an organism, person, or group is **not** predetermined, **fixed**, or **stagnant**. **It is rather Fluid, Lively, and Flexible**. It fluctuates with the needs, tasks, and challenges depending on many **internal & external factors—**
like the circumstances surrounding the event; the pre-existing emotional & operational conditions; the available tangible resources; the support-system-team-connectivity; the innate faculties of that person, family, group, entity, or organism; and past experiences in handling severe crises and calamities.

Resiliency & Therapy

Counseling, Therapy, Medicine, and Clinical Care usually help in bringing mental clarity, gaining skills, increasing awareness, enhancing physical recovery, emotional intelligence, and existential hope, all the while working on unresolved issues, past injuries, and surmounting obstacles toward growth and equilibrium.

Thus, ***Resilience-Focused Therapy, Resilience-Informed Medicine, Resilience-Oriented Counseling, Education, & Healthcare*** can all increase healthy coping and survival, facilitate rebounding-recovery, promote endurance, and enhance prosperity & balanced living.

Such approaches dwell on the positive ***strengths*** without ***minimizing*** the negative -- shadows, pains, habit struggles, and other agonies, but making the best of these experiences, *as they go hand in hand with insightful healing for individuals and groups alike!*

The Philosophy of Resilient Therapeutic-Care is basically Progress-Motivated and Forward-Oriented.



Resiliency & the Human Brain.

Specific **Training & Modeling** might actually change and improve the **wiring of the brain** for the best.

Because there is a natural connection among neurobiological vulnerability, neuroplasticity, and resiliency.

The field of *psychoneuroimmunology* focuses on the *integration* of the immune/central nervous systems **with** other physiological functions/processes.

The *psycho-behavioral* and immunological functions *mutually* affect, modulate, and alter each other, because of the multi-directional *communication pathways* shared among them.

(Abi-Hashem, 1999, 2020; Feder et al., 2010; Hawkley et al., 2005; Marsella & Pederson, 2004; Mayo Clinic, 2019; Tabibnia & Radecki, 2018)

Resiliency & Spirituality

*Religious faith, spiritual practice, religious affiliation, values, & mindset, and spiritual culture, tradition, & heritage, whether practiced alone-individually or with others-collectively, all have great **health benefits** in terms of the mind, psyche, mood, physiology, behavior, will, attitude, relational dynamics, and group-connectivity and communal solidarity.*

Hopeful & Solid Spirituality Enhances Survival & Endurance as well as counters Pessimism and Despair.

Spiritual Resiliency is a great resource, as another form of Recovery, as it is found to increase people's positive outlook, patience, and existential hope.

*Balanced activities of **religiousness** protects the psycho-emotional wellbeing to a certain degree, against severe crises, debilitating depressions, activating anxieties, and down-spiraling functioning.*

*Helping-Professionals & Providers are now being trained in evaluating and accommodating **Spirituality** and incorporating people's faith and religiosity within the **therapeutic relationship** and **treatment care**.*



Religious Culture is part of people's mindset, values, outlook, and worldview. It is how they see themselves, others, environment, and God. It is how they act upon the world and conduct themselves in relationships, in morality, and in all aspects of life.

According to Geertz (1973)

“Religion is a Cultural System”

Many definitions of religion are to a greater degree indistinguishable from those of culture and, therefore, are an important aspect of its mastery functions and skills.

Tillich (1959) eloquently summarized this interwoven relationship by considering *culture as the form of religion and religion as the substance of culture*.

He disconfirmed the dualism of culture versus spiritual life. Tillich wrote, **"Every religious act, not only in established religion, but in the most intimate movement of the soul, is culturally formed"** (p. 42).

Spirituality & Religiousness are great resources and another form of Resiliency promoting general Health Resources.

Other technical terms used to describe resiliency:

Hardiness. Elasticity.

Toughness. Flexibility.

Resurgence. Invulnerability.

Tenacity. Resourcefulness.

Pliability. Robustness. Mastery.



Adaptation & Acculturation



*are actually a common abilities and functions for people, especially those who have enough **adaptation** skills, available support, lively connections, reasonable expectations, social **solidarity**, worthy **causes**, **meaningful** association with others, solid heritage, and faith-based **existential** foundation.*

Some degree of resiliency is even possible for those who have a minimum ability for adaptation, regulation, and navigation.

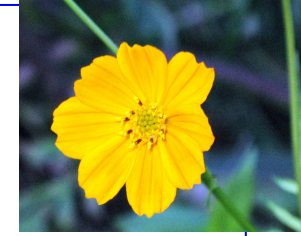
(cf. Unger 2008; Masten 2010)

Again - Resiliency is Utilizing and Mobilizing the best of cultural heritage, intrinsic insights, extrinsic resources, generational wisdom, and existential hope. Also, learning about the collective strengths and mastery skills, and internalizing the moral-ethical values, and vibrant spirituality will result in a ***Progressive Creativity in the Midst of Adversity.***

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Therefore, another way I can describe resiliency is
“Cultural Competency in Action”

All to be ***translated*** into practical survival and ***transplanted*** into the deep minds, souls, and hearts of the people-group, who can be rightly called ***‘resilient’*** (cf. Daskon, 2010)



Consider

*Social Bonding, Group Solidarity,
Common Goals, Similar Destiny,
and other Factors-Properties which are
Powerful Determinants for the Surviving,
the Sustaining, and the Thriving of any People-Group
(family, tribe, social unit, assembly, or nation)*

*That is true of communities facing danger and war traumas,
or teams rooting for **high causes** (even sports) and business
strategists, or humanitarian aid workers, or groups facing
persecution for their beliefs/religious ideology, or people
struggling during natural disasters and tragedies.*

*A Native Indian saying:
“Every day is a good day to live and a good day to die”*

The Mystery of Resiliency

& The Concept of Imago Dei

- What is at work in the Hidden Chambers of the Human Nature and Personality?
- How the human Faculties and Forces interact on personal-communal levels to Converge themselves in a ***dynamic-fluid way*** and result in beautiful styles of ***coping, survival, endurance, and creativity?*** *(Abi-Hashem, 2023 TPN Div 56)*
- ***Also, the Concept of “Imago Dei” (The Image of God) is a Theological Term referring to People as Human Beings, Created after the Likeness of God, with an Imprinted Spiritual Faculty or a Divine Quality in them.***
”صورة الله المطبوعة في الإنسان”
 - ***Is there a Pure Resiliency or is it always Mixed with Vulnerability and Struggles?***
- Convergence & Co-Existence of Human Nature – That is the Simultaneous Presence & Intergration of the Cluster of Strength & Weakness *(e.g., lights & shadows)*
- *See this Reference: Samuel Rufat. Existe-t’il une “Mauvaise” Résilience? 2010. Hal-00693161 [French]*
<https://hal.science/hal-00693161v1/document>



The Key Role of Worldview

It is a Mindset. A Multi-Layered Paradigm.

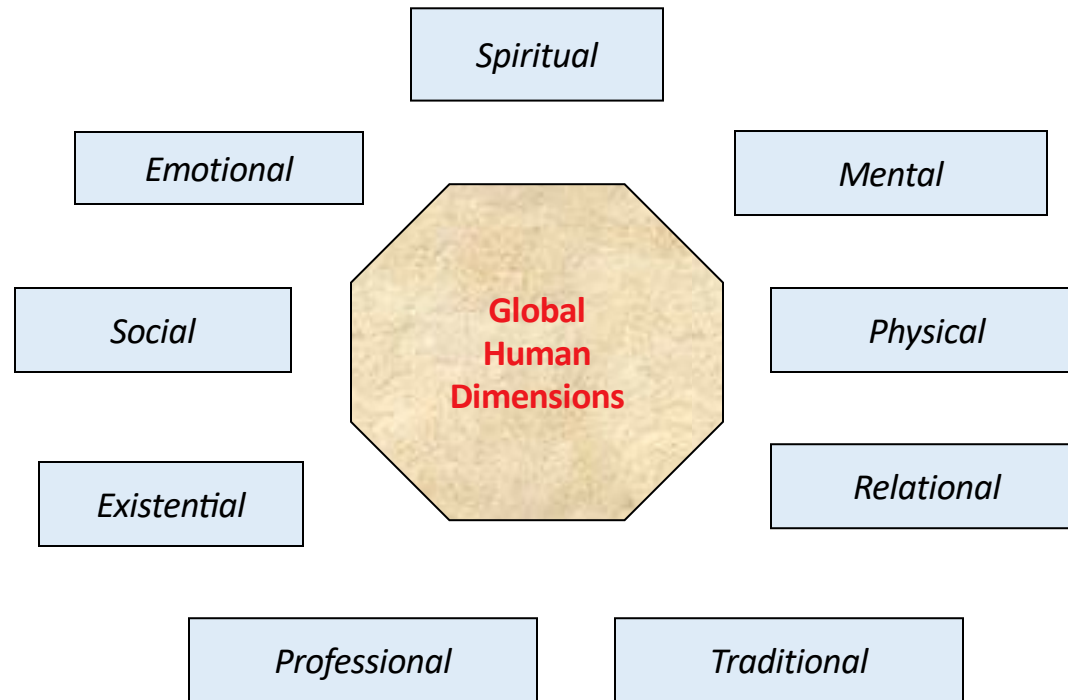
A Set of Assumptions, Filters, and Lenses.
It shapes our daily *Perspective* and ultimately our *Ideology*.

*How we Perceive the World
Affects How we Act Upon the world
and vice versa*

Some of us are Local citizens, some Global citizens, some are Both.

*Therefore, it is essential to develop and maintain a Healthy-Balanced
Worldview and keep checking on our assumptions & unconscious biases.*

Domains of Our Socio-Cultural Functioning



Mixing of Cultures can cause confusion, discomfort, division, polarization, anxiety, or threat– This may lead to a ***counter-culture*** movement and may result in separation and alienation. However, if these cross-cultural encounters are positive the result will be enlightening, adventurous, and enriching for all parties involved.

Cultural Assets, dynamics, and heritages are rich and do substantially account for the surviving ability of people and the livelihood of societies as well.

Cultural Capitals provide a psychosocial reservoir of wealth and wisdom stored within the generation as refined insights, guiding principles, and daily skills, therefore are naturally transmitted through many venues to enhance and empower all human beings belonging to that circle or psychosocial tribe.

(cf. Daskon, 2010) [e.g., wisdom-sayings of grandparents]

All of these require Cultural Humility to Discover, Learn, and Enjoy.

Resiliency & Cultural Competency

During the last decade or so, **cultural competency** has been highly encouraged and emphasized in all areas of human services, education trainings, and social transactions, both locally and globally (e.g., gaining cultural awareness, cross-cultural skills, and multicultural sensitivity).

Here, I suggest to equally promote the cultural bases and resources of **resiliency** in order to counter the high tendencies of individualism and rigid personal boundaries and extreme self-reliance, which are resulting in **human emotional isolation & dis-connectivity**, like being removed from the true collective of bonding and the vital sphere of the rich sustainable heritage.

These individualistic tendencies are becoming characteristics of our urbanized lifestyle, industrialized society, digital-tech age, and virtual realities.

(cf. Turkle, 2011; Weil, 2011).

In other words, it is a call to re-invent community and re-establish a type of cohesive-tribal-environment (as a cultural mediator), to reserve, revitalize, and re-contextualize functional resiliency as an existential phenomenon.

Sample of the Types and Spheres of Cultural Resiliency

Personal-Individual Resiliency

- Mental-Emotional
- Behavioral-Environmental

Organizational-Operational Resiliency

- *Technical-Industrial-Corporate*
 - *Financial-Managerial*

Relational-Interpersonal Resiliency

- *Habitual-Familial*
- *Moral-Ethical*

National-Political Resiliency

- *Civic-Conventional*
- *Geopolitical-Governmental*

Social-Communal Resiliency

- *Tribal-Traditional*
- *Religious-Spiritual*

Global-International Resiliency

- *Mono-cultural*
- *Multi-cultural*
- *Trans-cultural*

Faith, Spirit, and the Existential Aspects of Resiliency

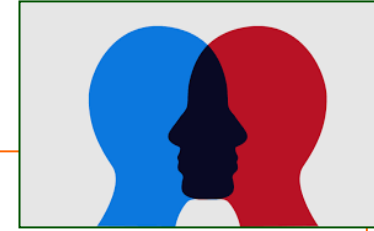
Spirituality is a significant ***motivational energy*** that may lead to individual and corporate ***growth***, even in the middle of existential chaos, moral crises, or philosophical ***dilemmas***.

Healthy religious faith and spiritual practice, when properly nurtured and cultivated (*including challenges & struggles*), will virtually lead to better ***awareness, development, regulation, empowerment, and maturity***.

(cf. Koenig, 2010, 2012; Tillich, 1959)

Regardless of the ongoing debate about the similarities and differences between ***Religion & Spirituality*** (*used distinctly or interchangeably*), both have proven to be an integral part of the human function and social fabric, which have a powerful impact on our developmental journey and cultural ideology. Best to phrase those terms as ***religious faith and spirituality***, in order to avoid the misunderstanding of using the term “religion” alone (*as emphasized earlier*).

Both concepts and practices are deeply rooted in human passion, mind, soul, history, community, and legacy, ***across time and space***.



Implications for Therapy

Sample Questions-Interventions

Do you consider yourself to be spiritual?
What does your belief system and your worldview teach you and inform you about this situation now?

How would your grandparent handle/deal/cope with such adversity?

How can your faith/spirituality/religious values inspire you at this time and juncture of life?

Is your Faith part of the solution or part of the problem?

Is there any wisdom, common sense, and generational insight from your heritage or cultural norms-traditions, you can employ now?



Are there any elders, mentors, or sages in your life that can help you? If not, where can you find them and adopt one or two?

How would you introduce yourself and identify your national-cultural and religious background?

What helpful resources do you have available among your friends, family, and relatives and within your religious circles and faith-community?

If you are a “role model” what other people, young and old, can see and observe in you? Especially when performing under pressure?

What would they learn from you?
How would you like them to remember you?

What kind of legacy would you like to leave behind after your life is over?

Major Obstacles to Cultural Resiliency

- a) Individualism and too much focus on the intrapsychic level and the personal reliance-independence domain.
- b) Linear thinking and tunnel-vision in mental operation, or exclusive focus on weaknesses & struggles for too long.
- c) Much emphasis on privacy, boundaries, autonomy, and glorification of personal establishments.
- d) Suggesting separation from parents, bonded-family members, clans, and communal groups.
- e) Tolerating dis-connectivity, isolation, separation, loneliness, and the lack of community.
- f) Leaving existential hope, faith, spirituality... out of the therapeutic discussion, intervention, and healthcare treatment.

Spiritual & Cultural Aspects of Recovery

- Faith vs Doubt (*wondering why?*)
 - Endurance vs Complaint
 - Acceptance vs Resentment
 - Over vs Under-Spiritualizing
 - Peace vs Existential Crisis
 - Hope vs Despair
- (role & place of mindfulness & prayer)*

- Role of Customs.
- Rituals & Traditions.
- Community & Family.
- Healing in Heritage.
- Warm Social Support.
- Use of Generational
Guidance & Wisdom.
- Mentoring, Solidarity, &
Resilient Recovery.

Ungar (2008) concluded that resiliency has global as well as cultural and contextual aspects to it. These assets, dynamics, and mediators include the following:

Oral traditions and stories repeatedly told.

Rituals and meaningful customs.

Verbal and non-verbal communication styles,

Religious faith and existential hope of the community.

Solidarity of people together.

Sense of dignity and honor within the clans (as modern tribes).

Realistic national pride.

Shared experiences from the past (especially of surviving-striving).

The role-models and the conducts of elders-mentors-counselors.

Realistic views of life (embracing hardships & struggles).

Ability to tolerate pain, expect hardship, and live with ambiguity.

Finally, Fortitude and Patience -- with self, others, and life as a prerequisite to true Resiliency.



How will Resiliency manifest itself
in the near future?



Where will it be rooted?

How will it be cultivated and mobilized?

We don't know yet as our world is changing and unfolding rapidly with unpredictability and increased polarizations.

We shall continue to hear accounts of survival, creativity, faith, and courageous hope in spite of the hardships, devastations, agonies, and dark forces that are still at work in our world today.

*Whatever happens to the meaning of societies and the role of cultures or how the years may unfold, **Resiliency**, as a human faculty and as an integral part of our journey, will remain based on our cultural heritage and spiritual foundation. It is alive and well and will continue to manifest itself within us and around us-- alone or with others-- locally & globally, so to enhance our humanness, camaraderie, and future aspirations.*

Therefore, Resiliency is the Ability to Transform:

*Pain into Purpose, Hopelessness into Hopefulness,
Perplexity into Passion, Crippling into Creativity,
Devastation into Determination,
Resigning into Reframing,
Depletion into Deployment,
Being Scattered into Being Refocused,
Disillusionment into Enlightenment,
Regression into Reinvestment,
Retreating into Re-envisioning,
Degenerating into Regenerating,
Misery into Mission, and
Tragedy into Treasure.*



(Abi-Hashem, 2020)

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